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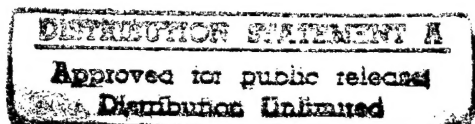
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STUDY ROOM FOR ATHEISM

-USSR-

By N. Zolotareva



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FOREWORD

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STUDY ROOM FOR ATHEISM

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Following is a translation of an article by N. Zolotareva in Kommunist Belorussii, No 12, Minsk, December 1960, pages 42-45.

The party, Komsomol, and trade union organizations of the Kobrinskiy Rayon contribute considerably to the atheist education of the workers. The study-room for atheism, established more than two years ago at the rayon party committee, plays an important role in this. It is supported by trained atheists. The most important problems of atheist propaganda and work plans are discussed at meetings of the study-room council, which consists of five people.

The study-room began its activity with the training of lecturers and agitators. With this view in mind, we conducted seminars about twice a month in which qualified atheist lecturers from Moscow, Minsk, and Brest took part. People who have broken with religion have appeared and will appear in the future at these seminars. They tell how it has helped them to be rid of the religious narcotic, and expose the methods of the Baptist preachers. The themes and texts of the lectures are discussed at the seminars.

At the decision of the rayon party committee a group of atheist propagandists went on an excursion to Leningrad, where they studied materials at the museum of the history of religion and atheism. They also met with atheist lecturers of the city, visited the planetarium of the Pulkovo Observatory, and the Vyborsk atheist club. Our comrades acquired necessary visual aids there: a collection of tables on astronomical, physical, and chemical apparatus and materials, which are now used extensively in our scientific atheist propaganda.

Exhibits have been presented on "Science and Religion," "The Origin of Man," and "The Graphic Arts and Religion" at the study-room. The necessary scientific and atheist literature, methodological accessories, handbooks, and thematics of lectures and discussions are also there.

Teachers, for the main part, are our lecturers. By agreement with the director of the rayon section of public education and the director of some particular school, we invite them to the study-room for atheism for several days. Here they are helped in the preparation of their lectures. The members of the study-room council then listen to the text of the lectures, criticize them, and give their methodological advice. In this way 28 rural

atheist lecturers have been trained. Many of them take an active part in conducting atheist propaganda. The teachers A.A. Bren'ko, V.A. Dodolina, R.P. Nazaruk, lawyer Ye. V. Yarosh, physician T.I. Rabets, and M. Ye Lachimov, deputy editor of the rayon newspaper Pratsa, have given interesting and informative lectures to groups of believers.

The study-room carries on all its work in close contact with primary party organizations. Seminars for agitators, in which the problem of forms and methods of antireligious work in areas strengthened by the agitators were discussed, were arranged with our help on the collective farms imeni Kutuzov, "Znamya Pobedy," "Novaya Zhizn'," and "Zarya." The best agitators were experienced in conducting individual discussions with believers. For example, the atheist teacher, comrade Lavrenyuk told how he, in pointing out contradictions and absurdities in Biblical scripture, in citing examples of great achievements in science and technology, helps believing members of the agricultural artel imeni Kutuzova to free themselves from religion.

In the villages we noticed that in a number of party organizations some communists are passive and indifferent towards the atheist education of the collective farm workers. We notified the district party committee of this, and the committee decided to hold party meetings on all collective farms with the following agenda: the status of atheist propaganda, and means for improving it. The district committee sent a group of communists from headquarters to help in organizing and conducting these meetings. They circulated from place to place in the manner in which party members, Komsomol organizations, religious information groups, and members of village groups of the Society for the Dissemination of Political and Scientific Information take part in antireligious work. Party meetings were conducted with much activity. At these meetings concrete plans were made for strengthening scientific and atheist propaganda.

On the collective farm imeni Kutuzov the work of reorganizing scientific and atheist propaganda is headed by the director of the seven-year school, comrade F. G. Mel'nichuk, a party member. Communists and members of the agitators' collective carry on individual work with believers. In the collective farm brigades lectures on scientific and antireligious themes are given through the efforts of the Society's village group. Such themes as "Unusual Celestial Phenomena," "How Clouds and Precipitation are Formed," "Does Life Beyond the Grave Exist?," "The Origin and Nature of Christian Holidays," and others were treated in the lectures. The lectures of comrades F.G. Mel'nichuk, V.M. Lavrenyuk, N.N. Razgulyaeva, Ye. S. Khovavko were very popular with the collective farm workers. Other measures are also being taken.

Recently the teachers of the Khabovich school organized an oral journal on the collective farm, in which such questions as "What is Religion?" and "Are Flights into the Cosmos Possible for Man?" were answered. In two schools, a library, and a club, "atheist corners" were formed with the aid of our study-room. These "Atheist corners" are stocked with the antireligious literature, and newspaper and magazine articles on problems of science and technology. The "atheist corners" help the agitators in gathering literature for the preparation of discussions, as well as for dissemination

among believers. The results of these activities are good. Fewer and fewer people are attending church. Formerly there were instances in which parents forced their children to carry out religious rites, and some church members forbade their children to attend movies, concerts, and to participate in various other activities. At the present time there are no instances of such practices on the collective farm imeni Kutuzov.

Serious attention is given to graphic agitation. On the streets of the city and villages more than one hundred bulletin boards have been set up, on which one may read the classics of Marx and Lenin on religion. These bright sharp texts hit the nail right on the head. They expose the reactionary essence of religion, sectarian morals, and the antisocial role of the Vatican.

In the center of Kobrin, on Ploshchad' Svobody, a stand with the title of "The Atheist" has been set up. An editorial board of 13 members is responsible for the material of the stand. "The Atheist" is interesting and therefore attracts attention. Thematic exhibits take up the central place. In the first two exhibits, "The Graphic Arts and Religion," reproductions of paintings by Russian artists which exposed the greed, hypocrisy, and ignorance of the clergy were displayed. The paintings "The Village Sermon," "The Village Easter Procession" by V. G. Perov, "The Sick Husband" by V. M. Maksimov, "The Denial of Confession" by I. Ye. Repin, "For the Sake of Christ" by N. V. Orlov, and others were viewed with great interest. The paintings have a great emotional influence on believers, and help them to understand the reactionary essence of religion. The exhibitions "The Origin of Religion" and "How Man Came into Being" were also well presented.

Materials from *Nsuka i religiya* (Science and Religion), which are changed every month, occupy three display windows of "The Atheist." There is a department "Ask and We Will Answer." Questions are of the most varied nature. We have already answered a number of them: "What is the Vatican?," "Who are the 'Saints'?," There is a box for collecting these questions under the display case. There is space set aside in "The Atheist" for information from the district and city. It is given under the titles "The Kobrinsk Atheist" and "The Mail Bag." What sort of information is collected here? We try to explain with concrete facts phenomena occurring in nature and society, and to expose religious fables. Here is a typical example. Once during a thunder storm the cathedral dome caught on fire. We decided to explain the cause of this incident, and to tell the cause of thunder storms in an article displayed in "The Atheist." The name of this article was "Lightning and the House of God." The hypocrisy of some believers and the morals of the clergy are also discussed in the notes of "The Atheist." For example, photographs of the intoxicated "Father Eugene," and the priest, Omel'yanyuk, who had to spend some time in a sobering up station after a period of debauch, were published. In one of the letters the escapades of the priest, Parfenyuk and deacon Gabrushuk of the Kobrin cathedral were exposed. The fact that they were using money collected from parishioners for their own purposes was emphasized. Such material, showing the true face of the clergy and the Baptist preachers, undermines faith in religious dogmas.

The study-room for atheism helps religious education groups in carrying on antireligious work. In most of the district's libraries there are "atheist corners" in which lively discussions of scientific and anti-religious literature takes place. Question and answer evenings, and readers' conferences are organized. Such conferences have been held on the books: Bibliya dlya veruyushchikh i neveruyushchikh (The Bible for the Believer and the Non-Believer) by Ye. Yaroslavskiy, Pochemu ya porval s veroy v Khrista (Why I Denounced My Faith in Christ) by Ye. Dulman, Chudotvornaya (The Miracle Worker) by V. Tendryakov, and others.

Through the initiative of the study-room for atheism, a film festival was held in the district House of Culture on the theme "The Cosmos Broadcasts: Heaven Without God." With complementary subscriptions supplied by the study-room for atheism, the believers saw 16 popular scientific and art films: "Road to the Stars," "The 20th Century," "Thunder and Lightning," "Earthquakes," "The Fire of Immortality," and others. Also, during the past summer, atheist film week was held in the central square of Kobrin. Thousands of spectators saw the films "Ivanna," "The Truth About Relics," "The Apostles Unmasked," and "The Truth about the Pentecostals." These films were shown in most of the villages of the district.

Our meetings and prolonged conversations with believers in the study-room for atheism and at home were of great interest to them. But this was not enough. In order to give believers a completely materialistic concept of the world and laws of its development a more extensive plan and greater organization is needed. The believers themselves suggested this. Once, during a discussion, a member of the Evangelical Baptist sect, K. Moysiyevich, expressed the desire that the discussions be held at a more convenient time, that they take place more regularly, and that more people be invited to them. This gave us the idea of social organizations for believers. With the help of these newly organized social organizations a class on "The Principles of Scientific Knowledge" was begun last year at the study-room for atheism. Thirty people attended it. Meetings took place once a week.

The course of study, divided up into 48 hours, included the following themes:

Astronomy: How astronomers perceive the Universe; the concept of the cosmos; the origin and structure of the solar system; the sun and its influence on the earth; comets and meteorites; solar and lunar eclipse; the problem of flights into the cosmos; the moon, the nearest space station;

Geophysics: origin, structure, and development of the earth; threatening phenomena of nature; the weather and possibilities of predicting it;

Biology: the origin and development of life on the earth; the origin of man; the brain and psyche; sleep, dreams, and hypnosis in the light of the teachings of I. P. Pavlov;

Medicine: achievements in modern medicine and pharmacology in the treatment and prevention of diseases; home remedies and quackery, the harm of quackery.

Also, lectures were given on the latest achievements of modern physics, of technical progress in the seven year school, and of how physics and chemistry have exposed the "miracles" of religion.

Seminar work was done on the theses: the cosmos and its structure; the origin of man; the brain and psyche; sleep, dreams, and hypnosis in the light of the teachings of I. P. Pavlov.

The study-room lecture council attracted lecturers of the scientific atheist section of the district department of the Society for the Dissemination of Political and Scientific Knowledge. The following teachers have appeared before the class: V.N. Vladimirov, astronomy; M.M. Krugley, physics; V.K. Tibarovskiy, and L. P. Vragova, biology; I. K. Maksimuk and S. Ya. Kovler, physicians. In presenting their material they used visual aids supplied by the study-room.

There were usually many questions after the lectures. The teachers gave thorough answers to them. Of special interest was the lecture on hypnosis and its use in healing, given by the physician, comrade Kovler. The sessions would often last till late, since the students wanted to ask many questions, and to learn as much as possible.

The results of this undertaking were considerable. The members of the group are leaving their religion. Many of them have begun to read regularly scientific and atheist literature, the journals *Nanka i religiya*, *Nanka i zhizn'*, *Znaniye* -- *Sila*, *Priroda*, and others. They are becoming militant atheists. A member of the group Ye. F. Ivanova, a worker in a garment factory, told at a meeting of the collective about her complete break with the Baptists. She has joined the Komsomol. Her husband left the sect with her. It is possible to name many people who, during the last two or three years, have ceased frequenting houses of prayer, Orthodox and Catholic churches. They have taken the icons from the walls of their houses, and have begun to take an active part in social life.

This year there are two groups of "The Fundamentals of Scientific Knowledge" at work -- one in a garment factory, and the other in a domestic service combine.

In the future we will work to perfect and vary the forms of scientific and atheist propaganda in order to quickly overcome the heavy marks of the past -- the survivals of religion, and will help believers to become atheists, and active builders of the glorious structure of communism.